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A
SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF MERTON,
IN THE COUNTY OF SURREY,

BEFORE
THE CORPS
OF
MERTON VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,

ON
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1800.

BY THE
REV. JAMES OLIVE,
OF EMMANUEL COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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1800.



TO
JAMES HALFHIDE, ESQUIRE, CAPTAIN,
AND THE OTHER
MEMBERS
OF THE
MERTON CORPS OF VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,
AND TO
THE INHABITANTS
OF THE
PARISH OF MERTON,

By whose flattering Request it is published;

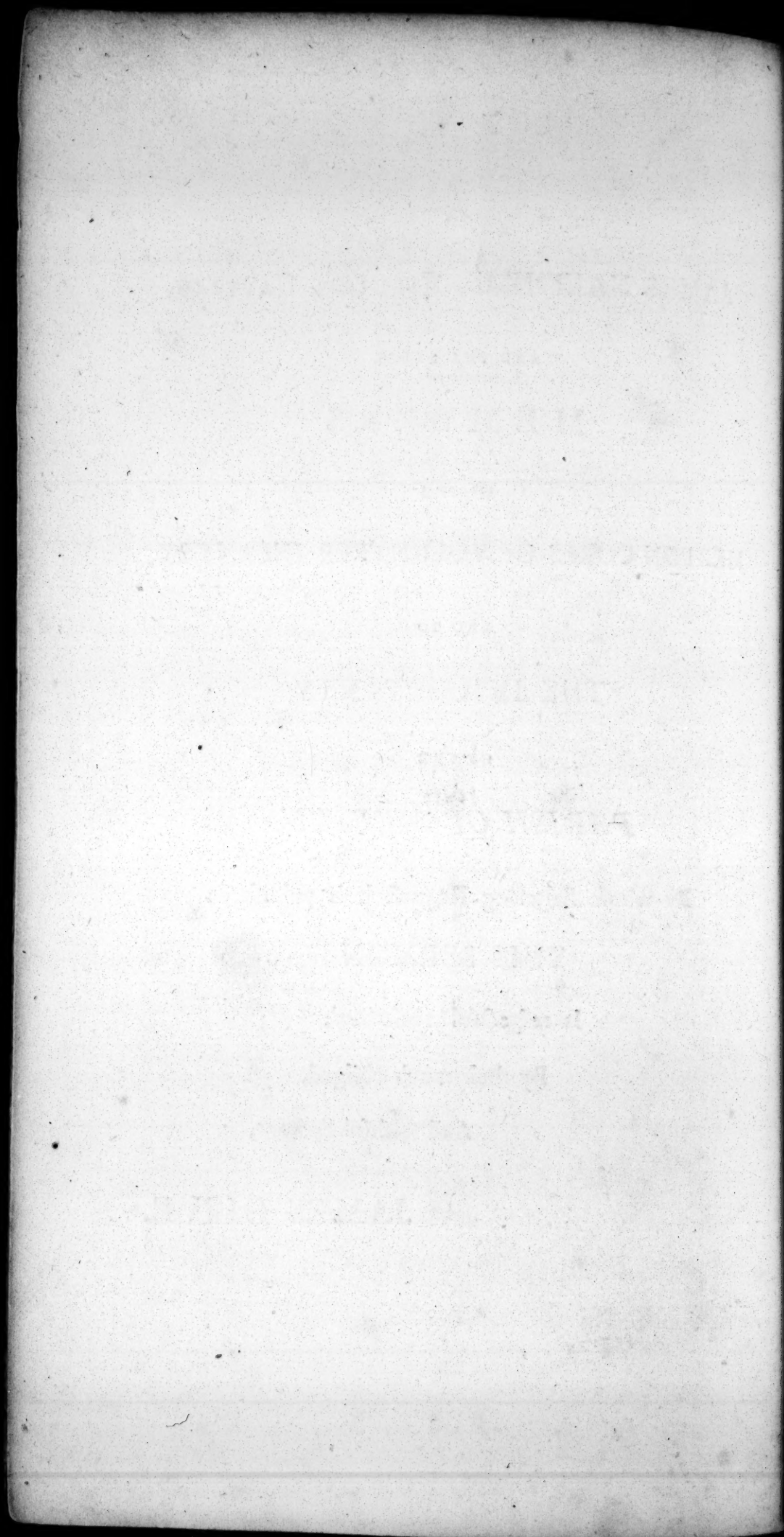
THIS SERMON

Is respectfully inscribed,

By their much obliged,

And faithful Servant,

JAMES OLIVE,



A

SERMON, &c.

PSALM xviii. 2.

THE LORD IS MY ROCK, AND MY FOR-
TRESS, AND MY DELIVERER: MY GOD,
MY STRENGTH, IN WHOM I WILL TRUST.

SUCH was the devout exclamation of David, upon his deliverance from the hands of his enemies, and accession to the throne of Israel. In the hour of security and triumph, this persecuted hero forgot not to whom he was indebted for his situation. He turned aside from the scene of grandeur which awaited him. He suppressed every emotion of vanity or of pride in which the celebrity of his character and his recent honours might tempt him to indulge; and, in a song no less remarkable for the strain of gratitude by which

it is animated, than for the sublimity of it's sentiments, he ascribed all his prosperity to the protection and assistance of God.

Though the particular circumstances which attended the elevation of David, and the direct and conspicuous proofs of a Divine interposition with which the Jews were, in those days, occasionally favoured, rendered, it must be confessed, this acknowledgement peculiarly indispensable, as well as emphatic, in the person of the Royal Psalmist;—the truth which it implies may be extended to men and nations in every age. The Providence of God, which regulates and controuls the events of life, and to which we are indebted, in a world of danger and misfortune, for all our security and all our happiness, is one of the first principles of morals that an enlightened mind adopts, and is an impression that the heart almost instinctively entertains.—This sentiment, which, in the ordinary course of human affairs, every good
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and reflecting man applies, in a peculiar manner, and in a more intimate degree, to *himself*, will obviously hold, in equal force, with regard to the *community* in which he lives :—and there have been occasions, in the history of the world, upon which all considerations of this nature, as they respect individuals, have given place, for a time, to the contemplation of those stupendous proofs of Divine power and goodness, which have been displayed in the fortunes and fate of nations.

—Impressed with this conviction, and looking to the situation of this country at the present day, permit me to direct your thoughts to the declaration of the Psalmist, as a declaration which, in your national capacity, you may adopt with singular propriety and truth—

“ The Lord is our rock, our fortress, and
 “ our deliverer : our God, and our strength,
 “ in whom we will trust.”

To form a proper estimate of national prosperity, it is necessary to consider the cir-

cumstances under which it is attained or preserved. In this view, the situation of the country in which we live, though it appears, in every age, to have been favoured, in a remarkable degree, with the Divine Protection, may be regarded, at the present period, as a signal monument of the Providence of God. The principles, upon which, in submission to that Providence, civilized nations had previously depended for their security and existence have been radically disturbed, and a conflict has arisen from their violation, of which Europe has long felt, and will, it may be apprehended, long continue to feel, the effects. By these evils, the state of almost every country in this quarter of the globe has, in various ways, and in different degrees, been affected. Among one people—the firmest ties by which men can be united to each other, and to the established ordinances of their land have been dissolved, and a state of national degradation and misery has resulted from their dissolution, to which the
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annals of mankind afford no parallel. Among another, the pursuits of peace and innocence have, by the hard lot which the violators of them imposed, been abandoned for the prosecution of a just, but useless, defence. Among a third, the apprehensions excited by a new and fallacious system of Liberty, have had the unhappy effect of aggravating the tyranny to which they were previously subjected;—and, among most of them, we behold a complication of misfortunes, and an uncertainty of fate, of which human conjecture can neither foresee the termination, nor fix the result.

Such is the picture which the state of Europe, at the present day, holds out to our contemplation. If however, in this general survey of the events which are passing in it's different communities, we look more particularly to the situation of our own, we must acknowledge, with unspeakable satisfaction, that the description does not apply indiscriminately to *all*;—and whilst we behold and

lament the calamities with which our brethren of mankind are afflicted, we shall feel, and be thankful for, the peculiar and unhopèd for blessings of this favoured land. We shall recollect that, with God for it's "Rock, it's Fortrefs, and it's Deliverer," it has been enabled, for a series of years, to withstand all the attacks of it's enemies ; and that, at a period when the political and civil fabrics of surrounding states are shaken to their centre, it stands, if we have the virtue to support it, upon the firmest foundation of security, grandeur, and happiness.

Indulging however, as it is our duty to indulge, in those sentiments of pious gratitude which the contemplation of our national prosperity so justly demands, we have, at the same time, the gratification to reflect that, as far as any human efforts can challenge praise, that prosperity has not been bestowed upon an undeserving people. When we consider indeed with all the impartiality
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that the subject will admit, the part which this country has sustained during the long, arduous, and important contest in which it has been engaged, it is impossible to withhold from it the most perfect tribute of our esteem and admiration. Divided, as, in a remarkable degree, it has ever been divided, within itself, by the spirit and opinion of party, and, with the certain prospect, should it unite against the common enemy, of numerous and fore distresses,—it saw and understood the alternative to which it was reduced. It sacrificed every subordinate consideration of partial and temporary evil, for the preservation of that sum of good, whose existence was at stake. Inspired by a superior love, and actuated by the deepest solicitude, for it's Laws, it's Religion, and it's Social Order ; it devoted all it's jealousies, and many of it's comforts, at the altar of Public Safety. With a cheerfulness, a spirit, and a promptitude, of which it seems to have furnished a solitary example, it determined to resist the foe, from

whatever quarter, in whatever form, with whatever circumstances of danger, he might appear.

In the prosecution of this honourable purpose, virtues have been displayed which will confer the most lasting honour upon the British nation. Among these, it would be injustice, upon the present occasion, to reflect upon *one* proof it has exhibited, of propriety of sentiment and firmness of conduct, without peculiar expressions of gratitude and respect. Not contented with a cheerful submission to those sacrifices of property which the necessity of the times imposed—and with a more liberal *contribution* than the circumstances, undoubtedly, of many of its promoters would easily admit, to the exigencies of the state—the great body of all that is respectable in the land has personally stepped forward in its service. Strangers to the profession of arms, and engaged, for the most part, in far other pursuits of labour and importance, they

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have devoted their time, their attention, and, eventually, their lives to the safety and welfare of their country. Their conduct, it may be added, upon all occasions on which their exertions have been required, has been consistent with the principles which led them to unite. Exposed to foreign invasion, or menaced with internal convulsions, England has alike found in them her protectors and preservers. By the blessing of Providence, their importance, in the former view, has rarely been attested. From the result, however, of every attack that has yet been made upon us from abroad, we have no reason to apprehend the consequences of any which may be made in future. Our invaders have, in a memorable instance, been convinced that, whatever expectations they might have formed from the insidious reports of a traiterous spirit pervading the people who were to be opposed to them—a country like this is possessed of an impregnable

nable security in the virtue and spirit of it's inhabitants.

It were to be wished that this had been the only theatre upon which the military character of our countrymen had found occasion for it's display. But the calamities of war, which are, at all times, severe, have, in the present contest, been aggravated by the danger of domestic insurrection. A misguided spirit of liberty, kindled by those excesses of which a neighbouring country has set the example, and inflamed by the arts of ambitious and designing men in that and in our own, had, at one period, infected to a very considerable extent, the useful and laborious orders of the British community. Disqualified, by their situation, for deciding on questions of so high importance,—ignorant, as they necessarily must be, of their true welfare—prompted by motives of which they knew not distinctly the nature—and with no other rule of conduct than

than the guidance of very criminal passions—they threatened to rebel against the power which had protected, preserved, and supported them. In this awful crisis of their country's fate, the more faithful and respectable part of the nation knew and felt what was their duty,—and it is to their interposition, on this emergency as on the other, co-operating with the civil power, and offered at so early a period as to prevent extremities, that we are, under Divine Providence, unquestionably indebted for our preservation.

In what has hitherto been said, we have had occasion to applaud the patriotic spirit which, during a most important period, has displayed itself among our countrymen, and to congratulate ourselves upon the success with which their exertions have been attended. Our Laws, our Religion, and our Social Order, which constitute our chief blessings, and are the natural foundation of
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all others, have, by these exertions, been preserved, as we have seen, from the most imminent danger ;—and, whatever attacks may be made upon them in future, we have no reason to doubt of their continuance, as long as the love of virtue and a sense of religion shall dwell in the hearts of our countrymen. It is to be lamented that the situation of things for some years past has been such, that their security was to be purchased only by the sacrifice of a blessing of which every people must feel the deprivation. It would be blindness not to perceive, and inhumanity not to compassionate, the distresses which the present long and severe war has brought upon this country. It has imposed hardships upon some orders of the community, and occasioned afflictions to families, of which every good man anxiously sighs for the termination. In this, then, as in every similar situation of life, it is the part of wisdom and of duty, under the pressure of misfortune, to seek for motives

motives of patience and resignation. In the case before us, they will be found, I am persuaded, equally obvious and powerful.

We cannot, amidst the evils with which we are afflicted, sufficiently accustom ourselves to consider the object for which they have been incurred. It is not only the opinion of those, whose declarations and conduct are usually regarded with a jealous eye, but it is also, we may affirm, the general sense of the country, that upon the spirit that was manifested and the exertions that were used in the present contest, all our religious and civil blessings depended. With the grand determination to preserve these against the encroachments or assaults of infidelity and sedition, it was thought necessary, as I have before remarked, to submit to partial and temporary distresses. But, though the nation considered such an object to be worthy of every sacrifice, it's humanity has not been insensible to the severity of the alternative;—and prompted no less by a concern for it's
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common afflictions than by the regard which all men naturally have to their own comfort, it has long watched, with the deepest anxiety, for a termination of the conflict. Such appears to be, in a peculiar degree, the temper of the country at the present day. Circumstances have occurred which have given to these feelings additional prevalence and ardour. The danger with which we were, at one period threatened, from the traiterous combination of foreign and domestic foes is, thanks be to God ! considerably diminished ; and as the eyes of men seem more and more open to the fallacy and wickedness of those principles which, with so much industry, these foes have laboured to disseminate, and the apprehensions of which formed one principal ground of the contest, we now look, with better hopes than we have often cherished, to the establishment, at no very distant period, of peace. The accomplishment of this desirable event rests ultimately upon the will of Providence. But the general sense of a people will not in this,

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nor can it, with permanent success, be in *any* country, opposed by its rulers:—and we have every assurance, which experience and the nature of things can give, that whenever circumstances shall fully justify the belief that tranquillity can be restored upon the firm foundation of security and honour,—the opportunity will not be rejected by our own.

In the mean time, let us fairly reflect whether, amidst all our distresses, we have not many sources of alleviation. In mentioning these, I would not be thought to throw a cold and superficial regard upon those fore and heavy calamities with which the present war has afflicted so many families in this country. While we indulge in the feelings of national pride, which the contemplation of those spirited and brilliant achievements, performed in the course of it, so justly excites, I cannot forget that our triumphs have been purchased by sacrifices, for which nothing that humanity can offer,
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can be deemed an adequate consolation. The loss of fathers, of brethren, of husbands and of children who have fallen in the service of their country can, in respect to *itself*, be only alleviated by the pious resignation, and the religious hopes of their survivors. Their *wounded affections* must look to God, not to man, for comfort. As far, however, as the hand of national assistance was necessary, or could be serviceable to them, it has not been withheld. The merits of our brave departed countrymen have been liberally acknowledged in the support which has been given to their destitute and helpless families ; and it will, I doubt not, be a consoling and a proud reflection to those who now stand, or may hereafter stand, in a similar post of danger, that they fight for a country which is grateful for their services, and that, whatever may befall *them*—the wife and children of their affections will not be forsaken.

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If we regard the support and the comfort of the poorer orders of the community, under the losses and afflictions which they are doomed more particularly to sustain in the season of war, this, it will be allowed, is no inconsiderable alleviation of it's evils ; and it is an instance, I believe, of national humanity and gratitude which is, in a great measure, peculiar to our own country.

There are also some points, in which the nation in general seems to be particularly relieved, and for which it is indebted, in a no less eminent degree, to the equity and wisdom of the Legislature. I allude to the division of the public burdens. These burdens have, with few exceptions, and those perhaps inseparable from the case, been imposed, after mature consideration and experience, with so just a regard to the circumstances of every individual, as to have considerably lessened their weight. We may even take the matter in a higher point of

view—and divesting ourselves, for a time, of those feelings, by which, in considering this subject, we are apt to be influenced, reflect, whether the hardships of which we so frequently complain, are not, with respect to a large portion of the community, an advantage and a blessing. In consequence of the great increase and extensive diffusion of riches, we were making a rapid progress towards that summit of luxury and vice, in which, every people who were devoted to them, have found their ruin. This licentious spirit had acquired indeed so high an ascendancy in this country, and was so much encouraged by the above cause, that a taxation of unexampled amount has been unequal to the suppression of it. But, though these impositions have not been attended with *all* the effect which could have been wished, they must necessarily have been attended with *some*. They have, at least, it may be apprehended, had the important effect of checking the course of luxury in those, whose circumstances had barely enabled

enabled them to indulge in it; and, they appear also, in spite of numerous and great exceptions, to have given a serious and sober complexion to the general œconomy of domestic life. In estimating, therefore, the hardships which they may have occasioned to individuals, it is our duty to compare these with the benefits of which they have, in an equal proportion perhaps, though in a different point of view, been productive to the community at large.

Such is the view in which it is proper to consider the operation of the Public Burdens upon *most* orders of the state. There are, however, it must be confessed, many individuals, within their reach, upon whom, in the present times, they cannot be so justly regarded in the light of a wholesome restraint, as of a real hardship—and there are many *more* without their reach, whose situation would, without some assistance, be truly calamitous. From whatever cause this circum-

stance may arise, it unquestionably calls, not merely for occasional alleviation—but for *a general plan of relief*, and those who suffer by it may rest assured that such a plan, will, in some shape or other, be, at no distant period of time, adopted. It was never the character of this country to be insensible to the distresses of it's poorer orders—and they have long occupied, and, until the evil be removed, they will continue to occupy, the most serious consideration of it's national councils.—With this persuasion, let them accept, with thankfulness, the assistance which the benevolence of individuals and their respective parishes may at present afford them, and look forward, with hope and cheerfulness, to better times.—Above all things, we would deprecate the idea of their attempting to redress their own grievances. They must, in all cases, be the worst of lawgivers, because (how confident soever their passions may make them) they *can* have no sufficient knowledge of the sources from which their distresses proceed, and

their interference, accordingly, has, as might be expected, always terminated in mischief and disgrace. We have of late had some unhappy instances of this mutinous disposition, but (thanks to the exertions of that respectable body of men, of which I have before spoken!) the instigators of it are, by this time, we may hope, convinced of its guilt and folly. I trust and believe that, sensible of its incalculable danger, our Protectors will, on every future emergency upon which their interposition may be wanting, display a similar spirit—and that the poorer part of our countrymen, who have had the merit of submitting to their hardships with modesty and patience, and of whom, it must, in justice, be said, the number is very great—will regard them, (as I doubt not they will) not as the Creatures of Despotism, or as the proud and selfish men of the earth retained or interested to oppress the lower orders—but as men, who compose the heart of their country, who feel for their fellow-countrymen the affection

fection of brethren, and whom nothing but a concern for their common security could have reconciled to the idea of arming against them.

Becoming, however, as these sentiments of moderation, respect, and gratitude are, they are not the only, nor the most important sentiments, which, in times of difficulty and peril, it is our duty to entertain. Under the pressure of want, or the apprehension of danger,—under *all* our misfortunes and *all* our anxieties, it is to *God* that we must ultimately look for assistance and protection. “ Though Paul may plant, and Apollos “ may water, it is He only that can give the “ increafe.”

As there never was a period when the importance of these religious impressions was greater than the present, so there never was a country which had greater encouragement for entertaining them than our own. When we

reflect indeed, on the invaluable blessings it enjoys under a kind Providence, we cannot but condemn, in the strongest terms, the unreasonableness, the weakness, and the ingratitude of that desponding temper, which, in a temporary season of difficulty and distress, has betrayed itself in so many of our countrymen. Not to mention those signal proofs of the Divine Favour which it has experienced in *former* ages—in that wonderful deliverance, more especially, from the machinations of religious fanaticism which the present season recalls to our recollection—in the characteristic mildness of its government both in Church and State, amidst surrounding bigotry and oppression—and in the peaceful termination and happy result of its various domestic troubles—not to mention these and many other blessings with which, as a nation, we have, in past ages, so peculiarly been favoured—we seem, with respect to the grand sources of national prosperity, to have every thing,

thing, at the *present* period, which can concur to make a people happy. We have a constitution, which, founded as in all essential particulars it is, upon the principles of liberty and justice, securely and permanently provides for the good of those who live under it. We have a King upon the throne, of whose character, respect for the freedom and privileges of the subject forms a prominent feature—and we have a Religion, which, divested of every hurtful superstition, and conformable with the purity of the Gospel, seems calculated, above all others, to have the happiest influence upon the minds and conduct of it's members. It is true, indeed, that these fundamental blessings do not necessarily ensure the uninterrupted enjoyment of all others, but they are the best security a nation can have for them, and even where their efficacy fails, they may be esteemed a most important proof that it is not forsaken by the Almighty.

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With the pious confidence, then, of Christians, who have experienced, in so singular a degree, the goodness of Providence, let us, my brethren, look forward to the future. God only knows how the awful scene which is now passing in the world will close. It is a subject, to every human eye, veiled in impenetrable mystery. It is our duty to hope that the crimes of which it has been so fruitful may be repented of and forgiven, and that it may terminate happily for our brethren in general of mankind.—For our own part, if we look to the situation in which we stand after our long and severe struggles, and to our hereditary and established blessings, we have no cause for despair. All that we have to do is to act, in our several capacities, as our best principles shall direct, and cheerfully leave the rest to Heaven. Our confidence, we may rely upon it, will not be misplaced. In a national, as well as an individual view, the Almighty has ever proved, and ever will

prove himself to those who are deserving of his protection, “ a Rock, a Fortrefs, and a Deliverer ; a God, and a strength, in whom “ they may trust.”

